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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003193

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SUBJECT: SECRETARY OF DEFENSE'S MEETING WITH KRG PRESIDENT  
MASOUD BARZANI ON DECEMBER 11, 2009

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher R. Hill for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: On December 11, 2009 Secretary of Defense Gates (SecDef) met Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) President Masud Barzani in Irbil. SecDef discussed the importance of a timely, inclusive government formation process and reiterated the key messages delivered to Barzani on December 6 by POTUS and VPOTUS. He reassured Barzani of the continuing U.S. commitment to a friendship with the Kurds, but underscored that the U.S. views improving relations with Baghdad as the most effective means to preserve and expand the KRG,s success. SecDef pledged U.S. readiness to support the KRG in peacefully resolving Arab-Kurd disputes. A visibly pleased Barzani thanked SecDef for his remarks and highlighted the KRG,s commitment to Iraq,s stability and unity, based on the Iraqi Constitution. Barzani went further than usual when discussing the political process in Baghdad, and stated that compromise with other political blocs is more important to the Kurds than risking friendship with the U.S. The meeting concluded with both leaders exchanging commitments to see each other soon in Washington. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) SecDef was joined by the following U.S. participants: Ambassador Hill, Assistant Secretary of Defense Vershbow, MNC-I Commanding General Jacoby, Vice Admiral and Senior Military Advisor to the SecDef Kernan, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Middle East Policy Kahl, Special Assistant to the SecDef McCarthy, and Press Secretary Morrell. Barzani was joined by the following KRG participants: Head of Foreign Relations Bakir, Minister of Interior Sinjari, Director of Intelligence Masrur Barzani, Minister for Peshmerga Affairs Mustafa, Deputy Minister for Peshmerga Affairs Adulrahman, Director General for Peshmerga Affairs Yawar, and Chief of Staff to the President Hussein. REASSURING THE KURDS

13. (C) SecDef opened the meeting by thanking Barzani for his help in securing agreement on an election law. He then explained that his principal purpose for visiting Irbil was to reinforce the importance of the continuing U.S. friendship with the KRG. SecDef stated that the U.S. remains committed to the Security Agreement and Strategic Framework Agreement with the Government of Iraq (GoI). He said that Kurdish cooperation is critical to the success of implementing both agreements, and ensuring that Iraq remains stable and unified. SecDef stated that he recognized the KRG,s concerns as the U.S. draws down, but assured Barzani that the U.S. was committed to helping the KRG preserve its security, autonomy, and prosperity within a unified Iraq. He emphasized that the U.S. will not abandon the KRG, and noted that resolution of remaining disputes with Baghdad was the most effective means to protect and expand the KRG,s success.

### THREE COMMITMENTS

4.(C) SecDef said that he wanted to personally underscore the messages delivered on December 6 by POTUS and VPOTUS to Barzani. He emphasized three commitments: 1) the U.S. will use its influence to help resolve outstanding disputes with the GoI - oil revenues, disputed internal boundaries (DIBs) and Kirkuk's status - in a manner consistent with Article 140 and the Iraqi constitution; 2) the U.S. will continue Qand the Iraqi constitution; 2) the U.S. will continue military coordination to the Iraqi Security Forces and Peshmerga through the joint security architecture in northern Iraq, and; 3) the U.S. will provide assistance and support for a national census in 2010.

15. (C) SecDef concluded by delivering four national unity messages as guiding principles for the pre-election and government formation periods, emphasizing that the U.S. is advocating these points to all parties: 1) commit to national unity during the government formation period; 2) avoid maximalist rhetoric and actions that will empower hardliners and extremists; 3) maintain flexible policy positions, and; 4) support peaceful resolution of all disputes. SecDef concluded by saying he looked forward to welcoming Barzani to Washington per POTUS, invitation.

### BARZANI RESPONDS ... AND TAKES NOTES

16. (C) Barzani, who enthusiastically took notes during the SecDef,s comments, opened his remarks by stating that the KRG shares U.S. aspirations for a stable and unified Iraq. He said that until recently U.S. policy toward the KRG was unclear to Kurdish leaders, but the messages from POTUS, VPOTUS, and SecDef have reassured the KRG of U.S. commitment

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to friendship and support. Barzani said the KRG aspires to contribute in a "useful way" to Iraq, and desires to be part of the solution to Iraq,s stability and unity. Noting the KRG's "duty" to protect Iraq,s unity, he stressed that such support was contingent on the GoI,s respect for the Iraqi Constitution and a federal, democratic Iraq. The Kurdish people could never again live in a "dictatorial Iraq", he said. Barzani continued that all democracies experience disagreements, but the political process of dialogue and negotiation - with U.S. support ) will provide the path to reach agreements.

### COMPROMISE: NO LONGER A DIRTY WORD?

17. (C) Barzani continued that the upcoming parliamentary elections will determine Iraq,s future, and that no party can expect to receive "100 percent" of its demands in the new government. He then stated that "negotiation and compromise" will be important, and that the U.S. can help in overcoming obstacles during the government-formation period and with other disputes. Referring to U.S. efforts to help broker an election law compromise, Barzani stressed that "Our (Kurds') friendship with the U.S. is more important than one or two seats in the Parliament." Coalitions were necessary to govern in Iraq and the Kurdish Alliance is already exploring coalitions with other political blocs that believe in "democracy and peaceful coexistence" for all communities in Iraq. He concluded by reiterating continued Kurdish support against terrorism, and expressed his eagerness to visit Washington at the convenience of U.S. leaders.

### A COMMON MESSAGE: THE IMPORTANCE OF TIMELY, INCLUSIVE GOVERNMENT FORMATION

18. (C) SecDef thanked Barzani for his comments and commitment to Iraqi national unity. He told Barzani that during meetings with the Presidency Council and Prime Minister Maliki, he had emphasized the need for a timely, inclusive government formation process. SecDef observed that the government formation experience following the 2005 elections was painful and provided extremists with the opportunity to stoke ethno-sectarian tensions. He told Barzani that Ambassador Hill and General Odierno are standing by to help facilitate relations between Baghdad and Irbil. Ambassador Hill added that the joint security architecture in northern Iraq marks a significant achievement, and that it potentially

provides a vehicle to make progress on other political issues in the DIBs areas.

¶9. (C) COMMENT: Barzani,s use of the term "compromise," along with his statement that no party can expect to secure 100 percent of its demands, potentially marks a significant step forward in the KRG,s commitment to Iraqi unity. Further, his emphasis on the importance of maintaining a positive relationship with the U.S. offers a point of leverage if Kurdish positions during the government formation process require U.S. mediation. Barzani received three messages of support from the highest levels of the U.S. Government in one week, and is clearly reassured and optimistic regarding U.S. support for helping to resolve outstanding issues with Baghdad. Maintaining Kurdish confidence will require us to follow through on our commitments on Arab-Kurd mediation, the joint security architecture, and a 2010 census. However, we need to ensure Qarchitecture, and a 2010 census. However, we need to ensure that Kurdish leaders understand that our support for resolving disputes according to Article 140 refers to a "confirmatory" referendum on Kirkuk's status after a negotiated political agreement, and not to a "decisional" referendum. We also need to continue emphasizing that flexibility, compromise, and leadership by both Baghdad and Irbil remains critical for Iraq,s stability and unity. END COMMENT.

¶10. (FOUO) DASD Kahl reviewed and approved this cable.  
HILL